

The Support Making Assessments Reliable and Timely (SMART) Act

Helping states design leaner, higher-quality assessment systems aligned with college- and career-ready standards

The Problem: Educators and students too often face redundant, low-quality, and unnecessary testing.

Reliable, high-quality assessments are important components of education; however, too many students are taking low-quality, redundant, and unnecessary tests. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires that states administer annual reading and math assessments in grades 3-8 and once in high school, as well as three science exams between grades 3-12. As states transition to assessments aligned with college- and career-ready standards, it's important that assessment systems be high-quality and meaningful.

States and school districts frequently administer tests beyond what federal law requires, and some of these tests are duplicative or outdated. A recent Center for American Progress report found that students take, on average, **ten standardized tests each year** in grades 3-8, and another report found that stark disparities persist among school districts in the time devoted to testing. Students in some districts spend **100 hours more taking tests** than students in other districts. Local exams clearly contribute to the testing burden borne by students and teachers in some states and districts.

Additionally, many educators lack the time and support to make use of assessment data, rendering even worthwhile exams ineffective in improving teaching and learning.

State assessment systems should support students, parents, and educators. The SMART Act promotes this goal. It supports educators, students, and families, who use regular statewide assessments as one helpful tool for monitoring students' progress, by streamlining assessment systems so there is more time for teaching and learning.

The Solution: Use an existing funding source to help states and districts streamline assessment systems.

The SMART Act updates a formula grant for improving the use of assessments.

- The Act uses an existing grant to increase the amount of support states receive for administering statewide exams aligned to college- and career-ready standards.
- The Act also allows states to use additional funds to develop plans to make better use of assessments, including quicker delivery of assessment data to educators and parents, more understandable assessment data, and more time for educators to collaborate and plan in response to the data.

The SMART Act provides resources for states that choose to audit state and local assessment systems and eliminate outdated, duplicative, or misaligned assessments.

- Participating states will gather data on their assessment systems and make the findings publicly available. States can use the federal funds to eliminate unnecessary assessments, design more sensible systems that align with standards, and support educators so they get the most out of the remaining assessments.

Efforts to streamline assessment systems are gaining momentum. In October of 2014, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Council of the Great City Schools agreed to eliminate redundant assessments and improve the transparency and alignment of high-quality assessments. The SMART Act supports those efforts.

The SMART Act is a commonsense approach to help states and school districts do more with fewer tests while preserving the meaningful role that assessments play in improving academic outcomes for all students.